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ABSTRACT

The acquisition of Irish as a second language in a four-year-old child of bilingual parents attending an Irish-language preschool group in Ireland is chronicled, with emphasis on the characteristic features of her language learning process and the factors determining which language she uses with others. The study was based on transcribed adult-child conversations with a high proportion of question-answer interactions. The distinctive features discussed in detail include the use of the Irish vocative, colors and numbers, use of prepositions and constructions in which the subject is expressed by means of a preposition, sentence complexity, transfer of discourse skills, participation in conversation, and the productive use of questions as a learning strategy. (MSE)

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**Elthne:
a study of second language
development**

Maire Owens

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(continued on back cover)

Spring 1986

RITHNE:

A STUDY OF SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

by

Máire Owens

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

It is a daunting reality for teachers of Irish that although we have two official languages in Ireland, a high proportion of the population is monolingual. Much effort and talent are expended on the teaching and learning of Irish to little avail. One wonders where the fault lies and what might be the key to the problem.

A recent survey of bilingual mothers in Wales, many of whom are raising their children as monolingual English speakers, offers some relevant insights, although the situation in Wales is not identical with that in Ireland:

Figures like those cited above show that bilingual mothers do not set out to attack Welsh. Rather, their failure to pass on that language contributes to a situation they regret. One might suggest in summary that bilingual mothers rear monolingual English children because the encouragement, even pressures, for that language generally are

stronger and more widespread than the corresponding support and facilities fostering bilingualism in Wales.

(Harrison-Bellin and Pritter 1981, p.61)

The same survey found that mothers were ill-informed about the language development of bilingual children, that they had fears, which experts could prove to be groundless, about their children's development in English being retarded. Harrison-Bellin and Pritter suggested that such a basic aspect of child care should be catered for by the ready provision of information and counselling.

Figures published a short time ago in Ireland have shown that Irish people are well-disposed towards the Irish language, but there is clearly a discrepancy between attitude and realization. My own experience supports the findings of the Welsh survey: because I had learnt Irish only in secondary school, I felt that my children would be at a disadvantage if I spoke to them only in a language in which I was not fully competent, and I hesitated to use both Irish and English in case that might cause confusion. Despite my lack of confidence, my eldest child acquired a fair competence in Irish, my second somewhat less, but both were helped by attending an Irish-medium national school.

Elithne, the subject of this study, is some three years younger than my second child and reached the age of three without acquiring more than a word or two in Irish, comprehension of an occasional phrase like "dún an doras" ("shut the door") and "cá bhfuil do bhróga" ("where are your shoes?"), and some knowledge of the sound system through the Irish names which we all have and the small amount of Irish spoken with the older children in

connection with school.

We were very fortunate that by the time Eithne was three a neighbour had opened a Nafonra, an Irish-speaking pre-school group. Eithne's attendance there from September 1982 has been of enormous benefit to her and a great support to me in increasing the amount of Irish we speak at home and providing information and suggestions as to how partial bilingualism can be achieved.

A short cross-sectional pilot study of Nafonraí by Síle Ní Aodhagáin (1981) found evidence of substantial achievement by children learning Irish:

The present study found that children attending Nafonraí do acquire a proficient level of Irish - both at the comprehension and expression levels. All the children could understand Irish and could speak Irish to various degrees. (p.21)

Since such a study is inevitably limited in scope, I felt it would be worthwhile studying in detail the language acquired by one four-year-old. I wondered if under the restricted conditions of the Nafonra (restricted in time and amount of individual attention) real language "acquisition" could take place, to what extent, by what processes, how effectively or economically. This study relates how I discovered some answers to these questions. I have found it fascinating; I hope others may find it useful.

I should point out that Eithne spent two years in the Nafonra, whereas many children have only one. She started aged 3 years and 3 months, with the minimum of Irish I have already described but already a competent speaker of English with quite

an extensive vocabulary and range of expression.

The Nafonra functions four days a week, from 10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., for the duration of the school year. Activities consist of free play with selected toys, games, songs, painting, crafts, etc. The older children do some work involving pre-reading/writing and mathematical skills. The policy of the stiúrthóir (director) is to speak Irish to the children at all times, directing their activities, participating in their play, helping them as required. The children are aware, however, that she also speaks English - some of the parents have little or no Irish - and if a child is really confused and at a loss she will translate. As far as I can observe, the children accept that she is a person who speaks Irish and have no difficulty in responding to her in English, or in Irish as their competence develops.

In Eithne's first year there were 9 children, in the second 10, of whom only one, Deirdre, the daughter of the stiúrthóir, normally spoke Irish.

During the first year Eithne was collected and looked after in the afternoons by a friend who had little Irish. At home we encouraged her to tell us about her experiences, but although we heard all the rhymes and songs and there was an obvious improvement in her comprehension, she still produced little spontaneous Irish. I began to speak more Irish with all the children at selected times - at meal times, while out in the car - and to read some simple stories to them in Irish. In the pamphlet "An Tuismitheoir agus an Nafonra" ("The Parent and the Nafonra", Mhic Mhathúna 1983) there is a list of vocabulary, phrases and structures used by children in Nafonra. By the end of her first year Eithne had command of most of that vocabulary, comprehension of the phrases

and structures, and productive command of the phrases and structures in certain contexts.

For example, from the beginning the stiúrthóir insisted, with the co-operation of the parents, that the children greet her on arrival

"Dia dhuit, a bhean"
("God with you, woman")

and ask for what they wanted

"Ba mhaith liom ..."
("I would like ...")

- whether point of a particular colour or biscuits at break time. At home Eithne took to always asking for a biscuit in this way (maybe she reckoned she stood a better chance of getting one). It later became one of the most productive structures in her repertoire as we shall see.

When the Nafonra re-opened in September 1983, Eithne was one or four older children there, all in their second year. I had more time with her: I brought her each morning and collected her at lunchtime, and made a practice of speaking in Irish at these times. As she became more independent, she and Deirdre spent more time together outside the Nafonra, and although they spoke English among themselves, both Deirdre's mother and I consistently spoke Irish with them.

I began this study in January 1984, by which time (as I hope to show) Eithne was productively positing rules and analysing the structures chunk-learned from what she heard. As I listened to some of the older children in the group and reflected on Eithne's progress over the previous year, it seemed as though she had initially

latched on to a few basic structures which could be used immediately but that most of that first year had been spent absorbing and comprehending. It had taken a long time for her to reach the stage of being able to assemble elements to suit herself.

A feature that amazed me was her awareness of linguistic processes. She refused to attempt constructions of which she was not fully confident. What she said, while at times underdeveloped, was to the point and accurate. From my experience of language teaching, I expected a lot of transfer errors, but in fact these were almost non-existent. While it was clear that she was building the language system for herself, I could not always fathom how she found the correct pattern. Word order in Irish is significantly different from word order in English, yet when Eithne produces a sentence, the order is invariably correct from simple possessed/possessor phrases as in "teach Deirdre" ("house of Deirdre") to the following example, where she added elements together until she found an adequate expression. For English "the woman gave the jersey back to him" she produced

*Mamaf - a bhean - an bhean - tabhair an bhean
geansaf - geansaf n-ais duit*
(Mammy - woman [vocative] - the woman - give
the woman jumper - jumper back to you)

After initial skirmishing to identify "the woman", going through and rejecting the women she knew words for, i.e. mother and teacher (see p.19) before finally abstracting "the woman", she then correctly formed her sentence. She failed to provide tense for the verb or determiner for the object, omitted the first unstressed element of the adverb "thar n-ais", and did not analyse the

prepositional pronoun for person. It is nevertheless an understandable utterance, showing no trace of interference from English but rather a developing system in which a VSO word order rule is already fixed. How had she reached this stage? Detailed attention to what she said over a period of some months revealed some of her methods and strategies.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Since Eithne normally chatters incessantly, I anticipated no difficulty in obtaining a large amount of data. Her production in Irish, however, proved far less accessible than expected, and she was either unwilling or unable to "perform" at my convenience. I needed a simple way of focussing her production in Irish to give a real but manageable sample.

The advantage of using a standardized test, such as the Bilingual Syntax Measure (Burt et al. 1978), is that it provides a means of comparison for a large group of subjects. However, this method has been criticized from several points of view. The 90% accuracy criterion is criticized by Andersen (1977) in an article significantly subtitled "The left-overs are more nourishing than the main course". Hatch (1974) and others have pointed out that acquisition of a form does not necessarily mean that the range of functions for which it can be used has been acquired. Rosansky (1976) found evidence that the BSM biased the language elicited; two of her subjects showed different orders of morpheme acquisition with the BSM on the one hand and spontaneous speech on the other. Meisel et al. (1981) found cross-sectional studies inadequate in trying to discover developmental stages in second language acquisition. They came to the conclusion that longitudinal studies, backed up by cross-sectional studies, are

the only promising way to find out about developmental sequences in natural acquisition - and possibly in language acquisition research quite generally
(p.117)

They question the order implied by most

acquisition studies:

There is absolutely no reason to believe that an L2 learner, especially in a natural setting, should always start with the "easy" parts of the grammar and leave the "most difficult" ones for later. Rather, he uses whatever is necessary to express his communicative needs, possibly choosing the least difficult of several alternatives.

(p.113)

The quantitative measuring of morphemes has also been criticized by Bowerman (1973, pp.11 pass.) on the grounds that even marginal utterances may be rule-governed and productive. The stringent productivity procedures used may well underestimate the child's competence.

I attempted to apply a version of the BSM to Eithne with no result, confirming the criticisms of both Bowerman and Andersen. She certainly had productive competence which the BSM could in no way tap. In the end I found that by keeping a record of casual transactions and recording several sessions of structured interaction, I built up a store of data more than sufficient for this study.

I have taken account of everything Eithne said, firstly because I was not concerned with counting morphemes but with her communicative progress, and also because even imitation involves the skills of knowing what to imitate and when it is appropriate. The elements I have chosen to present in detail constantly recur throughout the data and show clear patterns of development.

The casual transactions were mostly initiated by Eithne and occurred after she came home from the

Nafonra at lunchtime. I jotted them down on cards as or shortly after they took place. They represent normal transactions - exchange of information, requests for food/drink, descriptions. Inevitably, I was selective in what I wrote down; particular constructions, for one reason or another, struck me as significant at certain times.

The recorded conversations centred on picture books with which she was familiar. I tried to get her to talk about the pictures, tell the story and generally contribute to the interaction. Although my attention was partially on formal matters, these correspond to sessions that we often had, looking at books. The ineptness of some of my elicitation supports the notion that there was a fair degree of naturalness in our interaction. This is important because it means there was less concentration on forms and more on language in use.

The major disadvantage of my method is that these conversations consist to a high degree of question-and-answer exchanges. I have tried to establish whether this is normal in adult-child interaction or if I was taking on too much of the role of the teacher. In effect, if you want a response from a child, in a mode other than the normal, in this case in Irish, then questioning answers both criteria - it structures the exchange, requiring the child to respond in a particular way. As the sessions progressed and the structure was established, my questions grew fewer; in the transcript of 18 February there are examples of Eithne taking the initiative, asking me a question, changing the topic and contradicting. An incidental advantage was the answering strategies she developed (see section 5 below).

I also have some recordings of Eithne speaking with her father (A), the stiúrthóir of the Nafonra, and an adult native Irish speaker. She had no problem in adjusting to any of these, but her exchanges with them reveal no significant improvement in the quality or quantity of speech produced, while requiring assessment of an additional variable, so I have made little reference to them in this study.

All the time she was talking to me in Irish it was obvious that Eithne was aware she could fall back on English if necessary. Even introducing her to an adult Irish speaker who pretended not to have English made no difference. (She may not have had time to adjust to such a novel situation.) It would have been interesting to observe her interaction with a monolingual Irish-speaking child, but this has not been possible. She occasionally speaks some Irish with her friend Deirdre, but since the latter is bilingual, they normally use English.

I have referred to Eithne's refusal to be adventurous in her use of Irish. I think it significant that while she is ready to use what Irish she knows well and always started the recording sessions with enthusiasm, my probing led on several occasions to protests, tears and retreat to sucking her thumb. She tried very hard on these occasions and would seem to be searching for words. Hatch (1978) comments:

Recent work in first-language acquisition, in acquisition of phonology, on pre-syntactic language and on pragmatics [...] shows that the process is a very long, very demanding and frequently frustrating one for the child. I believe the same can be said about second-

Not only do some children learn more easily and more quickly than others:

[...] but in almost every diary study presented here, there is mention of experiences in which the child shows the same frustration, withdrawal and "paranoia" as adult language learners. (p.13)

Some of this frustration is undoubtedly due to having linguists for parents, who despite their many skills, cannot fully comprehend this business of language. On the other hand, Eithne, like many of the children cited by Hatch, is visibly and vocally unhappy when, despite her efforts, she cannot form a sentence acceptable to herself as an embodiment of the meaning she intends. In addition, some metalinguistic standard often makes her curb her production. Clark (1978) has studied the development of linguistic awareness and found that implicit knowledge of structures is present long before the child is aware of them. Eithne seems already to have established a self-imposed "monitor" very similar to that proposed by Krashen (1981). It is not a feature of her speech in English; it may be a result of the discrepancy between her competence in the two languages. These two factors, the stress and her "monitor", are additional reasons why using standardized tests would not have given a fair picture of her competence.

All the transactions I recorded are transcribed in standard Irish. Where a form diverged from the standard, I have given a phonetic transcription in square brackets ([]); where Eithne obviously code-switched, I have used the English form. There are some examples of English words with an

Irish suffix; these I have interpreted as seemed appropriate. For ease of identification all of Eithne's utterances are printed in italics. A translation into English is offered as a guide to readers without Irish. This is free in some instances but literal where the difference between the language systems seemed to me relevant to the example in question. Some indications of grammatical forms are also made. Utterances marked with an asterisk (*) are ungrammatical in ways which are not obvious from the translation.

The two early transcripts date from 10 and 18 February 1984; data from them are marked T10/2 and T18/2 respectively. Most of the data were collected in February and March 1984. I made some later recordings (also T), to which I occasionally refer where they contribute to the systems I have analysed.

I have made no attempt to study Eithne's phonological system. The input was very varied. The stiúrthóir of the Nafonra, Eithne's father, and I all learned a different one of the three main dialects of Irish. In the urban context in which we live, however, there has been some measure of standardization under the influence of schooling, the media, and the diverse varieties of the language with which one comes into contact. For the most part Eithne has acquired the pronunciation of the stiúrthóir, with elements of my idiolect and some untraceable items thrown in for good measure. The phonemes she uses are, however, recognizably Irish and she certainly makes important basic distinctions, such as the distinction between broad and slender consonants. She also "corrects" my pronunciation, insisting, for example, on "gar'áiste" and "or'áiste", where I prefer to put the emphasis on the first syllable.

3 PREVIOUS STUDIES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN IRISH

I had little evidence on acquisition of Irish as a first language with which to compare Eithne's progress. Séamas Mac Mathúna has published a "Prolegomena to a Study of Language Acquisition in Irish" (1979), but it is just that, a prolegomena. In the examination of his first subject's production, he focuses on phonology; and even though his second subject, Máirtín, is older and more advanced, there is little I can compare with Eithne's corpus.

One point is worth mentioning, however. According to Mac Mathúna, although Máirtín uses the substantive verb in both present and future (Irish makes a distinction between a substantive verb *bheith* and a copula *is*), he has a rule which allows him to omit it in the present tense as in the following example:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| O : Cén tainm atá air
(What's his name) | M : Sé dána
(He bold) |
| O : Sea, sin an fear dána
(Yes, that's the bold man) | M : Sea
(Yes) |
| O : Cén t-ainm atá air
(What's his name) | M : Sé mór
(He big) |

(M is omitting the initial "tá" - "tá sé dána")

This parallels usage found by Wall (1979), who studied two children in Donegal aged 21-22 months and 30 months respectively. Although Wall does not remark it, both his informants omitted the substantive verb. Alongside "cá bhfuil" ("where is") Celia used expressions omitting "bhfuil", e.g. "cá peann" ("where pen"); and in sentences of the agent/actor-action type she frequently omitted

"tá", e.g.

C : Dadaf amuigh baint prátaí
(Daddy out digging potatoes)

She had almost no negative expressions in the corpus analysed, and in the single example "níl" is missing:

C : No pingín agam
(No penny at me)

- this although she was using "amharc Frances" ("look at Frances") and "thit Teddy" ("Teddy fell"), "titfidh tú" ("you'll fall").

Horgan (1980) suggests that early word order in production is a psychological organizing process and that an agent/action/ object order reflects the temporal order of real world events and is therefore preferred by children. The VSO word-order of Irish seems to reject this otherwise convincing argument, unless one takes account of the examples given above which do reflect agent/action/object order. I have found nothing in Eithne's production to support or contradict this suggestion. As I said, there is little similarity between what she says and the samples given in the two accounts. It must be remembered that she was two years older, more skilled in communication, with a language already at her disposal. Interestingly, what she says in Irish shows little interference from English. For example, she does not omit "tá", although it might seem the obvious strategy, as well as being the strategy adopted by first language learners.

Word order in general is no more a problem to Eithne than it is to first language learners. Wall (1979) reports a profusion of possessive

constructions in both girls' production, e.g.

E : peann Eugene
(pen Eugene)

buidéal bable
(bottle baby)

and general adherence to the rule of placing the adjective after the noun, e.g.

colleán deas
(puppy nice)

In all my data I have no example of Eithne misplacing these constructions, even when she is code-switching because of insufficient vocabulary.

T18/2 M : agus cad a dúirt Eithne ... éadaí?
(And what did Eithne say ... clothes?)

E : éadaí nua
(clothes new)

M : ní éadaí nua a dúirt sí ach ...
(it wasn't new clothes she said but ...)

E : éadaí old
(clothes old)

T18/2 E : tá sin hata duck agus sin hata
bláthanna
(that's a hat duck and that's a hat
flowers)

Mac Mathúna (1979, p.86) reports also that Máirtín "differentiates at all times between the substantive verb and the copula". The data may be insufficient to judge conclusively, but parents of

children whose first language is Irish have commented that their children have some difficulty with the copula, probably as a result of underexposure. As with "yes"/"no" substitutes, one hears utterances of the type **"tá sé teach mór"* from both speakers in an English-speaking environment and people from the Gaeltacht (the correct form is *"is teach mór é"*, "it is a big house").

It did not surprise me, then, to hear from Eithne *"tá mise cailín"* ("I am a girl"), although I think it is a construction she rarely if ever hears. With her it seems to be an extension of the pattern *"tá mé mór"* ("I am big"), which is acceptable. In the following example, it seems unlikely also that she is borrowing from English because the word order is so different:

T18/2 E : **tá sin stocaf!*
(those are socks)

M : *níl - is scairfeanna iad sin*
(they're not - those are scarves)

E : *scairfeanna*
(scarves)

M : *agus cad a deir Eithne ansin?*
(and what does Eithne say then?)

E : **tá sin scarfa buí agus bán agus sin scarfa dearg*
(that's a yellow and white scarf and that's a red scarf)

[It is in fact quite correct to omit the verb as Eithne does in the second part of this utterance and to identify something using "sin" + NP]

Mac Mathúna (1979) also refers to Máirtín's use of "sea"/"ní hea" as "yes"/"no" substitutes. In an article on this subject O Siadhail (1973) says it is a feature which is coming into Irish from its close contact with English:

Is é cuspóir an ailt seo taispeáint go bhfuil córas an freagra sa nGaeilge ag imeacht go righín, i leab a chéile, é chóras macallach a bhí ina chuid da h-oighreacht Ind-Eorpach agus go bhfuil sé ag druidim le córas a bhfuil mírfhreagartha ann. (p.134)

(The aim of this article is to show that the answering system in Irish is changing gradually but steadily from the echo-system that was part of its Indo-European heritage and that it is becoming more a system with an answer-particle.)

There are several alternative answering patterns to be detected in the different dialects of which Máirtín has one and Eithne chose another (see also p.47 below). It may be significant that "tá" insertion is the pattern prevalent in the Donegal dialect (which I learned) but I doubt if it is marked enough for Eithne to have picked it up from me. It may be rather that it was the first positive/negative element she was able to synthesize from the data available to her.

Although, as I will show later, she has largely abandoned "tá"/"ní" as "yes"/"no" substitutes, since a recent holiday in a house where two boys from the Gaeltacht were also staying she has adopted "sea" as a preliminary answer to questions.

Síle Ní Aodhagáin's (1981) pilot study provided general back-up for some of my initial

assumptions, but I found little in it with which to compare details of Bithne's production. Ní Aodhagáin was concerned with a wide range of children in both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht Naíonraf and was trying to measure comprehension as well as production. I feel that with such a wide range of variables, her score counting must give less than the full picture, relying as it does also on measures of correctness and incorrectness.

I have therefore chosen to look at my data in terms of features which characterized them rather than attempt to relate them to any previous study of the acquisition of Irish. Inevitably, I had to select a small number of features; there are many others which might profitably bear scrutiny.

4 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF EITHNE'S PRODUCTION

4.1 Use of vocative

One of the earliest distinctions Eithne made between Irish and English was her use of the vocative in Irish, marked by "a" + initial lenition. Since many people, including myself, normally stick to the uninflected nominative form of names as in English, I was quite startled to realize early on that Eithne obviously considered it significant. The *stúirthóir* of the *Náfonra* decided the children should address her as "a bhean" and she correctly uses the vocative. As a result, all the children refer to her, even in English, as "a bhean".

28/5 E : a bhean says ...

Eithne has further rationalized the feature as a way of turning an English name into Irish. She recently commented that *Diarmaid* was the English and "a *Dhiarmaid*" the Irish form of a boy's name. At Christmas time she sat one day and made a list

25/12 E : a mhamaf
a bhean
a Mhéabh
a Dhónaill
a Chormaic

stopping when she came to "a *Róisín*" because it did not quite fit the pattern (/r/ cannot take lenition).

It will be interesting to see when and how she becomes aware that this, to her, basic concept has a limited range of application. Unfortunately, my inadequacy in this regard will probably cause her unnecessary confusion.

Meisel's (1981) contention that language learners do not necessarily learn the "easy" parts of the grammar before the "most difficult" is borne out here. Eithne has certainly assimilated this salient, but to English-speaking learners of Irish, difficult feature.

4.2 Colours and numbers

Very soon after starting in the Nafonra, Eithne became competent in using Irish for colours and numbers. This was encouraged by the *stiúrthóir* - playing counting games, counting everything, distinguishing colours, distributing paint or crayons. These are activities concentrated on by every type of play group for this age group. The children seemed to find no difficulty in acquiring either concept nor in having two systems of referral, English and Irish. Possibly since they were so consciously foregrounded, I find that Eithne now uses either language indiscriminately to refer to number and colour and can translate perfectly from one to the other.

There are of course some areas of colour that are differently distinguished by the two languages. No attempt was made to draw the children's attention to these, a system of binary equivalents being adhered to, e.g. "glas" = "green" (although Eithne also understands "uainne", but I think as a synonym for "glas"/"green"). None of the children objected to calling a goldfish "lasc rua" ("red fish") or commented on the example.

In developing the number system Eithne went through several stages. There are a couple of areas where the English and Irish systems diverge. "One" when counting is "a haon" in Irish, but when

used attributively it is "amháin", placed after the noun. "Two" when counting is "a dó", but when used attributively it is "dhá"; it comes before the noun but cannot stand alone. With both "amháin" and "dhá", "ceann" should be inserted as a referent - "ceann amháin, dhá cheann"; continuing this system, you then find "trí cinn" ("three") - "seacht gcinn" ("seven").

- 21/1 Early in the study Eithne revealed incomplete understanding of the system. She was showing me a doll she had made:

M : cé mhéad súil atá ag Éabha
(how many eyes has Eabha?)

E : dhá
(two)

M : cé mhéad srón
(how many noses?)

E : amháin
(one)

M : cé mhéad béal
(how many mouths?)

E : amháin
(one)

- 10/2 Not long afterwards she produced "trí cinn" but still inclined to use "amháin" as above. She has by now sorted out the correct forms and no longer makes these particular errors.

Another feature of Irish is that there is a separate system used to refer to people. With most numbers it is a case of adding "-ar"/"-ear"

to the cardinal ("cúigear", "seachtar", etc. - "five", "seven"). There are some exceptions - "beirt" ("two"), which stands alone, and cases like "triúr" ("three") which show minor modification. In her first year Eithne learnt a song involving these personal numbers. It began "Cúigear fear ag togáil tí" ("Five men building a house") and progressed backwards to "Fear amháin ..." ("One man ..."). Eithne was soon able to sing it fairly accurately. But one day in April 1984, after not having sung it for some time, she went through it, having obviously formed the "-ar" rule, and produced this series: "cúigear fear", "ceathrar fear", "trí-ar fear", "dó-ar fear", ending with "fear amháin". It is probably significant that this form is the same for people and for things. Exactly a week later she repeated the song, showing a further stage: "cúigear, ceathrar, triúr" - all correct -, but "beirt-ar fear" for "two men".

Recently she has begun to practice adding in Irish, on the model of the tables she hears recited by her older brother and sister. She can ask:

cad é a haon agus a haon?
(what's one and one?)

give the correct answer:

a haon agus a haon sin a dó
(one and one are two)

or ask in the form:

a dó agus a dó, cad é sin?
(two and two, what's that?)

The ease with which she does this shows, I think, a good grasp of the number system in Irish.

I should add that the rapidity with which she learned both colours and numbers is due in part to the fact that she was older than a child learning Irish as a first language. She obviously had the concepts and only had to relearn terminology.

4.3 Use of prepositions

Although she comprehended a range of prepositions, including "sa", "ar", "ag", "do", "le", at the time of the first recording she was using mostly only "sa" ("in") with occasional instances of "ar" ("on"). This corresponds to first language acquisition order noted by Brown (1973) and also by Mac Mathúna (1979) for Irish. She alternated the forms "sa" and "insean":

T10/2 M : cá bhfuil Santa Claus?
(where is Santa Claus?)

E : *ins an ...*
(in the ...)

M : cá bhfuil sé?
(where is he?)

E : *ins an sneachta*
(in the snow)

This exchange shows correct usage; but shortly after, looking at a picture of Mary riding a donkey and Joseph walking by her side, she used the same preposition again, somewhat incongruously:

M : cá bhfuil sí?

(where is she?)

E : *sa asal*
(in the donkey)

M : an bhfuil Iosaif ar an asal?
(is Joseph on the donkey?)

E : *níl*
(he's not)

M : an bhfuil - cá bhfuil sé? cad tá a dhéanamh aige?
(is he ... where is he? what's he doing?)

E : *sa ground*
(in the ground)

She then used "sa" correctly to express motion towards a place:

M : cá bhfuil siad ag dul?
(where are they going?)

E : *-sa -sa stábla*
(into - into the stable)

and again, incorrectly following the verb "féachaint":

M : cad air a bhfuil siad ag féachaint?
(what are they looking at?)

E : *sa leanbh*
(in the child)

A later example from the same transcript shows "ar" used correctly with "féachaint":

M : sin éan beag deas - cad tá a long ag na
héin ansin?
(that's a nice little bird - what are
the birds looking for there?)

E : *féachaint*
(looking)

M : tá siad ag féachaint?
(they are looking)

E : ar an sneachta
(at the snow)

"Ar" was then used incorrectly for motion towards,
where "sa" would have been acceptable:

E : *walking into the house*

M : abair é sin i nGaeilge
(say that in Irish)

E : *ag dul*
(going)

M : sea - ag dul?
(yes - going?)

E : ar an teach
(on the house)

and for motion upwards:

M : cé hé sin thuas ar an falla?
(who's that up on the wall?)

E : *Daidí*
(Daddy)

M : no - tá Daidí ...?

(No - Daddy is ...?)

E : *ag dul ar an ladder*
(going on the ladder)

But she then reverted to "sa" where "ar" would have been correct:

M : *cá bhfuil an bainne anois?*
(where is the milk now?)

E : *sa floor*
(in the floor)

It is unclear whether she was overextending "sa" or using both prepositions randomly to denote the relation of one noun to another.

In the next taped conversation she used mostly the form "insan" ("sa" is a contracted form of "insan"; the two forms may be used interchangeably). Sometimes she made "in-" sound like English "on", where "on" might in fact be used in English:

T18/2 M : *agus cá bhfuil na lámha?*
(and where are the hands?)

E : *insan poll*
(in the hole)

M : *insan - insan poll, agus cá bhfuil an ceann?*
(in the - in the hole, and where is the head?)

E : *insan brfste*
(in the trousers)

M : *ana-mhaith, agus cá bhfuil an hata?*

(very good, and where is the hat?)

E : *if[ə]nsan teidf, insan foot*
(in the teddy, in the foot)

This alternation continued until I offered an example of "ar an" which she then took up:

M : *cá bhfuil an hata?*
(where is the hat?)

E : *in - onsan cos*
(in - on the foot)

M : *agus cá bhfuil an cos?*
(and where is the foot?)

E : *insan hata*
(in the hat)

M : *agus cá bhfuil an lámh ag an teidf sin?*
(and where is that teddy's hand?)

E : *onsan - hata*
(in the hat [the hat was actually covering the hand])

M : *ar an hata, agus cá bhfuil ...?*
(on the hat, and where is ...?)

E : *ar an hata*
(on the hat)

M : *cá bhfuil an lámh eile sin*
(where's that other hand?)

E : *ar an ceann*
(on the head)

Later came some hesitation about the appropriateness of "ar" and "sa" where neither in

fact would do:

M : *cá bhfuil sí ag dul?*
(where is she going?)

E : *ar ... sa granny*
(on ... in the granny [to her
granny's])

and again where over a six-turn exchange she finally settled for the correct usage:

M : *cá bhfuil na héiníní?*
(where are the birdies?)

E : *ar an spéir*
(in the sky)

M : *an bhfuil siad istigh sa teach?*
(are they inside the house?)

E : *níl*
(they're not)

M : *cá bhfuil siad?*
(where are they?)

E : *insan spéir*
(in the sky)

Several months later (at the time of writing) she still has not full command of all prepositions but seems to have revised her system somewhat, bringing in additional elements like "*faoi*", "*in aice*" and "*ó*". Slobin (1982) gives evidence that the appearance of prepositions is preceded by cognitive development universally, but that language-specific differences can affect the rate and sequence of development of particular

linguistic forms. He was referring, of course, to first language acquisition. It is interesting that although Eithne had already acquired the concepts in English, she reverted to the most basic formula for the second language.

4.4 Constructions where the subject is expressed by means of a preposition

The preposition has a special role in Irish in verbal contexts. In a preliminary contrastive analysis of English and Irish, Mac Mathúna (1980) outlines two significant differences in usage. A preposition may be required in Irish with verbs that are transitive in English (e.g. "bhuaill Seán le Máire" for "Seán met Máire"), or there may be differences in the range of prepositions used with certain verbs (e.g. "d'fhéach sé ar an bpictiúr" for "he looked at the the picture").

Eithne clearly learns the prepositions required by verbs alongside them, as a chunk perhaps, although there are examples where she analyses the chunk into separate elements (see also next section):

31/3 E : ba mhaith liom féachaint ar an airgead
ar an uaireadóir
(I want to look at the silver on the
watch)

The second major feature of Irish in regard to prepositions is that where English has subject + verb + object, Irish often uses the verb "bheith" + noun + preposition or copula + adjective + preposition. The system is complex in that the preposition may combine with a noun, e.g. "ag Máire", "ag an bhean", or with a pronoun, giving a different form for each person, e.g. "agam",

"agat", "aige", "aici", "againn", "agaibh", "acu". Eithne appears to be well on the way to mastering these difficulties. "Níl fhios agam" ("I don't know") and "ba mhaith liom - ar mhaith leat" ("I would like - would you like") were among her most common usages from the start. By February, she had distinguished between "agam"/"agat" ("at me"/"at you"), "orm"/"ort" ("on me"/"on you").

12/1 M : an bhfuil ocras ort?
(are you hungry?)

E : níl ocras orm, tá tart orm
(I'm not hungry, I'm thirsty)

She had obvious difficulty in referring to a third person, however. Sometimes her answering strategies saw her through:

17/1 M : ar mhaith le teidí cupán tae?
(would Teddy like a cup of tea?)
E : ba mhaith
(would like)

This is essentially correct, although "leis" ("with him") might have been added to it. Similarly when asked about ownership:

T10/2 M : cé leis an leorai?
(whose is the lorry?)

E : Cormac

Again, the answer is acceptable and unmistakably Irish; if asked "whose lorry is it?", she would have replied "Cormac's". The inadequacy of her system shows up in the following example:

M : cé leis an scuab?
(whose is the brush?)

E : Mamaf, tusa
(Mammy, you)

In this case, she should have said "leatsa" ("with you"), although "le Mamaf" would have done. Gaps are evident also in the following exchange:

T10/2 M : ar mhaith le Eithne cruimíní?
(would Eithne like crumbs?)

E : ní maith ... cruimíní
(don't like ... crumbs)

M : ach ba mhaith leis na héin cruimíní
(but the birds would like the crumbs)

E : agus héan sin
(and that bird)

Her second answer is focussed on an agent, emphasizing one particular bird. As an alternative reply shortly after, she fell back on "níl":

M : an bhfuil tú cinnte nár mhaith leis
siúd rud éigin?
(are you certain he wouldn't like
something?)

E : níl - he's flying
(is not - he's flying)

From the context it was clear she meant to reinforce the "nár mhaith leis", although it looks as though she may have answered the question "an bhfuil ...?". Interestingly, she was able to put the correct form of prepositional pronoun into the mouth of a third person:

T10/2 M : cén chéist atá sé ag cur ar an bhfear sin?

(what question is he asking that man?)

E : *ba mhaith liom teach*
(I would like a house)

It may of course have been simply that the unanalysed chunk fitted except that this is the form she understood best and differentiated from "ar mhaith leat". She produced the form confidently, without hesitation, as though aware that it fitted.

In reference to a complicated picture of a bear putting his clothes on in all the wrong ways, she produced this fascinating exchange:

T18/2 M : *cén fáth nár chuir sé na bróga ar a cosa?*

(why did he not put the shoes on his feet?)

E : *níl fhios agam cá bhfuil na ...*
(I don't know where the ... are)

M : *na cosa*
(the feet)

E : *na cosa, cá bhfuil na cosa*
(the feet, where the feet are)

M : *níl fhios agat - níl fhios agatsa cá bhfuil na cosa*
(you don't know - you don't know where your feet are)

E : *níl béar fhios agam*
(is not bear knowledge at me)

M : *níl fhios*
(is not knowledge)

E : agat
 (at you)

M : ag an
 (at the)

E : *béar*
 (bear)

She obviously wanted to say "the bear does not know where his feet are" and tried to combine the elements "níl fhios agam - cá bhfuil - béar - na cosa". It is significant that when her attention was drawn to "agatsa", she realized that the mistake lay in the referent, that "agam" was the source of the confusion, and she then had to find a suitable place for "béar". Her ability to supply "béar" in the correct place at the end shows considerable awareness of the underlying system.

A further example of progress appears in the same transcript. In contrast to earlier usage, Eithne shows comprehension of the third person singular personal pronoun and the ability to analyse "leis" into "le" + person:

T18/2 M : cé leis a mbeidh sé ag imirt?
 (who will he be playing with?)

E : *le Eithne*
 (with Eithne)

I have a very recent example of her using a third person plural pronoun, although it had featured in the conversation a few times before:

T9/5 M : cén fáth a bhfuil siad ag fanacht?
 (why are they waiting?)

E : *ba mhaith ... [hesitation] ... leo ag
súgradh le Harry*
(they would like playing with Harry)

["ag súgradh" as used here is not acceptable
in Irish]

and a form of third person singular:

M : *cén fáth a bhfuil Harry ina sheasamh
mar sin? cad tá uaidh?*
(why is Harry standing like that?
what does he want?)

E : *ba mhaith [le:] siúl go dtí an páirc*
(he would like to walk to the park)

In sound it was closer to third person singular
feminine, although one would expect the masculine
"leis" to be more salient.

As I mentioned, Bithne was able to assign the
correct form to a third person even when it
involved mediation from a second person. Again
this is probably a reflection of the fact that her
cognitive processes were far in advance of her
competence in the second language:

27/3 E : *tell Dónall*

M : *abair leis ...?*

E : *abair leis Dónall ní feidir leat
chocolate spread a fháil*
(tell him Donall, you can't get any
chocolate spread)

Quite apart from this productive "ba mhaith" is
her development of other prepositional pronouns,
again incomplete but under way. "Orm"/"ort" I

mentioned already. To them one could add a partial productive understanding of "air" ("on him"), "agam"/"agat" ("at me"/"at you") and "dom"/"duit" ("to me"/"to you"). "Dom" she has realized can be used for a request:

7/4 M : tá oráiste te ag teastáil uaitse?
(you want hot orange?)

to which she might have replied "tá", but instead produced:

E : oráiste te dom
(hot orange for me)

Shortly afterwards, describing what she had been doing, she said:

M : cad a dhein tú?
(what did you make?)

E : dhein mé hata duit
(I made a hat for you)

and another day she handed me a letter as she came in, saying:

E : tá litir agam duit
(I have a letter for you)

The pattern is incomplete, however, because she also uses "duit" to refer to a third person, although there are signs of it coming:

T9/5 M : agus cad a dhein an buachaill beag?
(and what did the little boy do?)

E : tabhair sé thar nais duit - do
(he give back to you - to him)

4.5 More complex sentences

From the beginning of the period studied, Eithne has attempted to combine "ba mhaith liom" with VP. These attempts represent the most complex sentences in her production. An example of code-switching in January shows the chunk nature of this expression:

21/1 M : is liomsa an cathaoir seo
(this is my chair)

E : *I want to sit beside you*

M : abair é sin i nGaeilge
(say that in Irish)

E : *ba mhaith liom sit beside*
(I want to sit beside)

A : *ba mhaith liom suf in aice leat*
(I want to sit beside you)

E : *ba mhaith liom sit beside, not suf in*
aice leat
(I want to sit beside, not sit beside
you)

[She was making the point in this last utterance that she did not want to sit beside A but beside M]

The construction is quite simple where she wants to do something herself - where the subject is the same for both verbs:

18/2 M : cad a cheapann siad ansin?
(what do they think then?)

E : *ba mhaith liom dul ag siopadóireacht*

(I'd like to go shopping)

24/4 M : cad ba mhaith leat déanamh anois?
(what would you like to do now?)

E : dul amach ar an, ins an gáirdín cúil
(go out on the, in the back garden)

31/3 E : ba mhaith liom féachaint ar an airgead
ar an uaireadóir
(I would like to look at the silver on
the watch)

With some prompting, Eithne was able to produce
the correctly shaped clause with other verbs:

27/3 E : tell Dónall

M : abair leis
(tell him)

E : abair leis Dónall ní féidir leat
chocolate spread a fháil
(tell him Dónall you can't get
chocolate spread)

27/3 E : can I

M : an féidir liom
(can I)

E : an féidir liom ~~sa~~ ghearradh sin ag an
scoil?
(can I cut that at the school?)

[~~sa~~correct form: "sin a ghearradh"]

As Eithne's ability to refer to third persons
improves, so does her ability to handle this type
of sentence:

T9/5 E : *ba mhaith [lɛ:] siúl go dtí an páirc*
(he wants to walk to the park)

Eithne realized the problem of asking someone else to do something, again an example of her metalinguistic awareness. In English "I want you to put on the light" is very straightforward. In Irish it is more complicated; there is no room for the actor of the second verb. Her initial solution was to omit it:

10/2 E : **ba mhaith liom put on light*
(I want ...)

M : *ba mhaith leat solas*
(you want light)

E : **ba mhaith liom dún an doras*
(I want shut the door)

She was not in a position to act for herself and clearly required me to do it for her. She has developed this structure to the stage of inserting the agent:

E : **ba mhaith liom tusa teacht anseo*
(I want you to come here)

The fact that this construction presents no difficulty to her in English undoubtedly contributes to her wanting to use it in Irish. It is an example of structural difficulty impeding acquisition. The correct form in Irish requires use of a subordinate clause and the conditional tense: "*ba mhaith liom go dtiocfá anseo*" ("I would like that you would come here").

5 STRATEGIES WHICH FACILITATED ACQUISITION

5.1 Transfer of discourse skills

Shortly after commencing my study I was somewhat daunted to read Brown and Frazer's (1964) comment:

In the natural situation of the child with his family the best evidence that he possesses construction rules is the occurrence of systematic errors. So long as a child speaks correctly, it is possible that he says only what he has heard. (p.45)

I have remarked already on the accuracy of most of what Eithne was prepared to say. There seemed to be no way of forcing her to communicate in Irish and to reveal by her errors the state of her systems. I began to wonder if "acquisition" was taking place at all, or if she was simply "learning" phrases for use in certain contexts. Detailed examination did, however, produce evidence of the sort I felt was needed, some of which is analysed here, and she is now attempting to rationalize a complicated verbal system for herself, as revealed by her systematic errors.

Although she produced little evidence of an operative grammar of Irish, there was no doubt in my mind that she was able to converse. She could manipulate ordinary, everyday transactions effectively and the recordings which I made with her lasted thirty minutes each, during which time, although she occasionally lapsed into English to explain something to me, she maintained her side of the discourse. She answered questions, made comments of her own, introduced topics, asked questions and contradicted my statements. These, of course, were skills she had already developed

in her first language. She was familiar with the exercise of looking at pictures, having me direct her attention to certain features and translate the concepts into words. In general conversation she had learnt to ask specifically (and reasonably politely) for what she wanted, keep to the point when asked a question, comment, etc.

All her semiotic and prosodic skills could be transferred to a conversation in Irish, all she needed to find were the words and the syntax to express her meaning. And in fact, the first transcript shows that her contribution, while to the point, consisted mainly of isolated words. Being able to extract the relevant features from a speech act and reply appropriately requires considerable comprehension and skill. Garman (1979) refers to this ability to understand questions and answer them, omitting words implied in the question, as a mark of mature grammatical control (following Crystal et al. (1976), who were concerned with discerning language disability).

A further feature of that first transcript worth noting is that many of Eithne's turns began with some hesitation, lengthy in places. Umiker-Sebeok (1980) found that young children had quite a well-developed strategy of using "pre-starts" to hold on to their right to speak (3-year-olds) and to keep a conversation going (5-year-olds), presumably while they sorted out what was to be said. It was clear that Eithne was aware of her turn, wanted to contribute, and filled a gap with "mmmm ..." while she searched for an appropriate word or phrase.

Common to Eithne's production in Irish and the early words produced by a small child in its first language is the fact that one word carried a wealth of meaning. She would accompany a word

with gesture (pointing, shaking her head, laughing, grimacing) or prosodic features such as emphasis, questioning intonation, finality, etc. In a study of children's strategies in giving instructions, Cook-Gumpers (1977) noted that they differed substantially from an adult norm in exactly this way:

[...] the children used prosody, especially the negotiated patterns, to convey information which we assume would be lexicalized at a later stage of development. The lack of formalized beginning sequences, but an initial shift of intonation, is such an example. The negotiated passages of intonational shifts, such as C. and T.'s "warning tone", we would expect to be lexicalized into verbal comments in adult interaction. (p.120)

Other researchers, Slobin (1982) in particular, have shown that prosody plays a major role in helping children decipher speech. It is an invaluable strategy which can compensate for an incomplete productive grammar.

5.2 Taking part in conversation

Eithne did, however, also possess an increasing number of productive elements in her grammar and the question remains as to how she, or any child, sorts out the tangled web of communicative possibilities spun by generations of users.

Snow's (1979) article "Conversations with children" to my mind provides a simple but comprehensive explanation. The title itself is significant - the child does not develop language by abstraction from the plethora of conversation

around and over her, but from interaction with her mother or caretaker. Communication is basic to child-caretaker interaction, it is situated in a context which is almost self-explanatory, and to a large extent the child dictates the development of more complex interaction. As the needs of the child progress from an existence where food and sleep are paramount to the ceaseless activity of the three-year-old, so the child's language requirements grow, both semantic and syntactic. They are, however, still very much rooted in the concrete realities of daily existence and interaction is delimited by those realities. As Snow (1979) points out:

[...] the semantic content of speech addressed to young children is indeed severely restricted. Mothers limit their utterances to the present tense, to concrete nouns, to comments on what the child is doing and on what is happening around the child (Phillips 1973; Snow et al 1976). [...] This limitation on the semantic content of maternal speech can to a large extent explain the syntactic simplicity commented on above. Propositions of name, place, state and action can be expressed in short utterances without subordination or other syntactic complexities. The syntactic simplicity can thus to a large extent be seen as a artefact of semantic simplicity. (p.370)

While regretting the lack of "conversationally based analyses of maternal speech", Snow suggests two ways in which mother and child combine in conversation:

A very common pattern is for the child to introduce a topic, and for the mother to make a comment on that topic, or for the child to

introduce a topic and make a comment and for the mother to then expand that comment.

(p.372)

A feature of this type of conversation is the inequality of the partners, but the mother regularly allows the child to dominate and follows the lead given. The second observation follows work by Shugar (1978):

She described how mothers produce the utterances which create context within which very simple child utterances become meaningful parts of the rather complex whole. (pp.372f.)

These two patterns go a long way towards accounting for the discourse in my transcripts. They also indicate strategies which might be highlighted in language teaching, stressing the importance of genuine communication and promoting the use of first language discourse skills in the second language.

The importance of the semantic element, the topic, has been emphasized by other researchers. Larsen-Freeman (1980), in the introduction to *Discourse Analysis in Second Language Research*, refers to work by Scollon (1974):

[...] a structure in a child's competence may at first develop out of a construction that the child builds jointly with other speakers. Scollon calls such an exchange a vertical construction. (p.vi)

The child's utterance may be obscure taken out of context, but through encouragement to comment further, the child learns to produce "topic comment" constructions, to go on to "horizontal" syntactic constructions.

Hatch and Long (1980), working on similar lines to Snow, felt these suggestions applied equally well to second language learning, that syntactic structures are developed out of verbal interaction. She attaches importance to context features of such interaction:

[...] conversation topics between adult and child learner revolve around facts presumably known by both, frequently objects present in the environment and ongoing actions. (p.33)

Despite the findings of those researchers who deny that the semantic element is basic to the process of acquisition (Wanner and Gleitman 1982), my data seem only explainable by assigning priority to meaning. I cannot interpret Eithne's strategies in any other way; focussing on meaning seems to me to play a significant role. Cromer (1974) spoke of this:

It would appear, then, that the child does not *learn* words, but that he *invents* them for the things he wants to communicate. (p.206)

It has been noted that children asked to repeat a sentence will not simply imitate, but will map meaning onto structures according to their current grammar (Bennett 1982). Apart from the structural strategies, which Eithne also possesses, it seems to me that she does exactly this, conceives an intention and forms it into such words and constructions as are at her disposal. Cromer and Hatch agree with this ordering for both first and second language acquisition. In Cromer's view

[...] the child does not arrive at a meaning of these relationships because he has learned linguistic categories which then restructure

his thinking; instead he brings certain meanings to the task of language acquisition, and these affect even his very first words.
(p.207)

Hatch (1978) suggests that rather than acquiring basic syntactic patterns and then learning to use them in discourse, the learner

learns how to do conversation, how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction, syntactic structures are developed. (p.404)

Cromer accepted that the grammatical structure of a language posed demands of its own (see also Slobin 1982), which might impede or assist acquisition, but felt there was considerable evidence

that changes in cognition precede the acquisition of new linguistic forms which are normally used by adults to express them.
(p.245)

He was encouraged in this view by Brown's (1973) study. The initial utterances of the children could be interpreted in ways corresponding to the first grammatical morphemes to appear. The child first expressed communicative intent simply (undoubtedly with accompanying gesture, prosody and clear reference) and then began to add elements of syntax until the message could carry meaning independently.

A marked feature of my transcripts is the way in which Eithne would modify her English expression when she had to fall back on it to explain something, deleting syntactic morphemes and concentrating on direct meaning/word correlates. Looking at a picture of a duck throwing water over

a cat, she reduced her normally lucid descriptive English to the following:

T10/2 M : *cad a dhein an lacha ar an pussaf bocht?*
(what did the duck do to the poor pussy?)

E : *uisce all over pussaf*
(water all over pussy)

and again:

T18/2 M : *agus cad tá a dhéanamh aici?*
(and what is she doing?)

E : *wave hand to granny*

In both of these examples she has eliminated subject pronoun, tense (and also the verb in the first), possessive pronouns and articles. This laconic telescoping was completely in line with the type of utterance she was forming in Irish: a minimum of syntax and just enough words to convey her meaning.

In summary, I believe that Eithne began her learning of Irish with certain discourse skills - understanding of turn-taking, intense use of prosody, attention to pragmatics. She was involved in interaction within recurring contexts, encouraged to participate, given a few tools to do so and her contributions were often expanded. From such expansions and from her ongoing analysis of syntactic elements, she is developing a syntactic system which can grow in complexity as she makes more demands on it. While her command of English is superior to her command of Irish, analysis of her acquisition of English might well show similar restrictions of context and of syntax. But she certainly has control of sufficient functions to cope, within the context

of the Nafonra and home, with the role of a four-year-old.

5.3 A productive individual strategy

Many studies have been made of the way children develop the ability to ask questions. It is not a feature with which Eithne has had any trouble in Irish - her questions, while infrequent, are correctly formed, both simple and indirect. Of more interest are the strategies she has developed for answering questions. I mentioned my concern that so much of the data I had collected consisted of question-answer interaction. However this may differ from normal child-caretaker interaction, it seems to have been remarkably fruitful for Eithne. It also poses a major question - how, when she has heard so many questions, has she been able to develop correct answering strategies?

Yes/no questions in Irish are particularly difficult because there are no "yes"/"no" equivalents (but see p.16 above) and they should be answered with the verb of the question. The question form uses the particles "an"/"ar"/"nach"/"nár", of which "an"/"nach" pose an additional problem in that they are followed by the dependent form of the verb (this affects a small number of irregular verbs).

Wh-questions are C-questions in Irish. The particle comes at the beginning of the sentence, sometimes followed by the dependent form of the verb (e.g. "cá bhfuil tú?", "where are you?") and is answered variously by a noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective.

Previous to commencing this study, I noticed that Eithne and others in the group were using

"tá"/"ní" as "yes"/"no" substitutes, a usage which though historically un-Irish, can be heard not only from bilinguals but also in part in the Donegal dialect. One exception to this was the question "ar mhaith leat?" ("would you like?"), to which Eithne would answer correctly "ba mhaith"/"níor mhaith". She failed initially to differentiate between "ar mhaith" and "an maith" ("do ... like"), answering both with "ba mhaith", but by February had sorted out the separate forms and now controls them in both this form and others like "an féidir leat"/"is féidir liom" ("can you"/"I can").

Questions using the substantive verb she answered correctly with "tá"/"ní", and in February she began to develop a system for replying with the appropriate forms of other verbs. In the next example, she shows an awareness of the tense of the questions and of the need to reply appropriately:

T10/2 M : ar tháinig Santa chuig Eithne?
(did Santa come to Eithne?)

E : tá
[present tense, verb "bheith", "to be"]

M : tá?

E : bhí
[past tense, verb "bheith"]

This interaction went on to produce a form of the past tense for the verb "tabhair" ("to give"):

M : bhí - cad a thug sé?
(what did he bring?)

E : *Sindy*

M : thug sé Sindy duit - ar thug sé Sindy do Róisín?

(he gave you a Sindy - did he give a Sindy to Róisín?)

E : *ní* thug

(didn't give)

["ní" = present tense negative particle]

M : *ní* ar thug sé Sindy do Cormac?

(he didn't - did he give Cormac a Sindy?)

E : *ní(r)* thug

[some trace of the /r/ was present]

But later she reverted to "níl":

M : ar thug sé train track do Eithne?

(did he give Eithne a train track?)

E : *níl!*

This later use of "níl" was very emphatic. It may be that she was too preoccupied with refuting my ridiculous suggestion to pay attention to syntax. During the following weeks she developed the ability to return the verb of the question in the appropriate tense. With irregular verbs this gave rise to incorrect use of dependent forms and also, in present and future tenses, incorrect repetition of the eclipse following the interrogative particle "an":

14/2 M : an bhfuair tú go leor bricfeasta?

(did you get enough breakfast?)

E : [nod]

M : an bhfuair?

(did (you) get?)

E : bhfuair
(got)

Later the same day she detailed the process:

M : ar chuala tú Lúrabóg Lárabóg inniú?
(did you hear Lúrabóg Lárabóg today?)

E : níl - tá - bhí - chuala
[present negative - present positive -
past "bheith" - past "cíos"]

and reinforced it shortly afterwards:

E : a Mhamaf, [kuəlm] tusa Lúrabóg Lárabóg?
(Mammy, did you hear Lúrabóg Lárabóg?)
[Bithne omitted the question particle
"ar"]

M : nfor chuala
(I didn't)

She did not clearly distinguish between "ní" and
"nfor" (present and past tense negative
particles). Sometimes the /r/ seemed to be
present, but not regularly:

T18/2 M : ar chuir sé an hata ar a cheann?
(did he put the hat on his head?)

E : chuir
(he did)

M : ar chuir sé na bríste air féin?
(did he put on the trousers?)

E : ní chuir

M : ar chuir?

E : nf chuir

She retained control of the present tense of the verb "to be", but occasionally would apply her new rule to "an raibh", replying with "raibh", although at other times she answered "bhf". She was also able to reply to future "an mbeidh" with "beidh".

While one might postulate a simple formal strategy by which Eithne selected the salient verb, ignoring the particle, her ability to change strategies for C-questions indicates a more complex system. C-questions differ from the yes/no types only in the particle, and she could make complex discriminations between "cá", "cad", "cé", "conas", "cén fáth", as in the following example:

T18/2 M : cad a chuir sé ar a chluasa?
(what did he put on his ears?)

E : bróga
(shoes)

M : cá bhfuil sé ag dul?
(where's he going?)

E : sa playground
(to the playground)

M : cad a dhéanfaidh sé ins an playground?
(what will he do in the playground?)

E : imirt
(play)

M : cé leis a mbeidh sé ag imirt?

(who will he be playing with?)

E : *le Eithne*
(with Eithne)

It seems unlikely that she has structural rules to account for this wide variety of answer types to similarly formed questions; rather that she was working on a semantic base, forming a concept, and finding a structure to express it. Other examples confirm this view:

7/4 M : an bhfaighfidh mé éadaí duit?
(will I get clothes for you?)

E : *faigh!*
(get)

This answer was an imperative.

12/4 M : a Dhónaill, ar mhaith leat teacht liom?
(Dónall, do you want to come with me?)

D : nfor mhaith
(no)

M : Eithne, an bhfuil tusa ag teacht nó ag fanacht?
(Eithne, are you coming or staying?)

E : *ag fanacht*
(staying)

A simple strategy of returning the verb would not have worked here, where she had to isolate the final element of M's utterance and use it in acceptance of one of the alternatives offered, a sequence she had probably never heard since it is unlikely that she had ever offered such an alternative to anyone in Irish.

Looking at another example -

T18/12 E : *can we dress up?*

M : dúirt sé i nGaeilge á mar níl aon
Bhéarla ag an Tomás sin - dúirt sé
an ...?
(he said it in Irish because that
Tomás has no English - he said can
...)

E : *an bhfuil tú - an bhfuil cead agat?*
(are you - have you permission?)

M : *go maith - an bhfuil cead againn ...*
(good - have we permission)

E : *dress up in*

M : *na héadaí a chur orainn agus cad a*
dúirt Eithne?
(to put on the clothes and what did
Eithne say?)

E : *lá*
(yes)

- the final answering "lá" refers back fifteen words, in three speech acts to "an bhfuil". It can in no way be explained by an automatic surface structure rule.

Apart from their importance as responses to questions, it seems to be from these strategies that Eithne is beginning to build up a tense system. The forms she uses are often those of the questions, most obviously with the irregular verbs. Table 1 shows some of the forms Eithne has used in answering yes/no questions.

TABLE 1 Some of the forms Eithne has used in answering yes/no questions

VERB	QUESTION FORM	ANSWER	
		POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
bheith	an bhfuil?	tá	níl
	an raibh	bhí	ní raibh
	nach raibh	raibh	
	an mbéidh	beidh	ní beidh
faigh	an bhfaigheann siad		níl faigh
	an bhfaighfidh mé	faigh	
	an bhfuair	fuair bhfuair	
tabhair	ar thug	thug	níl ní thug ní(r) thug
téigh	an rachaidh	rachaidh	
	an ndeachaidh	(dh)each rach	níor #
cuir	ar chuir	chuir	ní chuir
nígh	ar nígh tú	nígh tú	ní/níl
ith	ar ith		ní ith
clois	an gcloiseann tu	cloisí me	
	ar chuala	chuala cuala	
feic	E. an bhfeicí		
	tusa?		
	an bhfaca	bhfaca	
déan	an ndéanann tú	dhéan	
	ar dhein	dhein	níor dhein
oscail	ar oscail	oscail*	
abair	ar dhúirt	dúirt*	
		úirt	
cabhair	an gcabhraíonn tusa		ní
taitin	ar thaitin	thaitin	níor thaitin
ól	ar ól sibh	ól me*	
fan	ar fhan siad	tá se	

*"d" is prefixed to verbs beginning with a vowel or "f" in the past tense. Although Eithne omits it as in "oscail" and "ól me", her dropping of the "d" in "úirt" may show some awareness of the rule ("úirt" might also be a simple repetition of the sound in "ar dhúirt").

6 CONCLUSION

I have tried to outline those aspects of Bithne's production in Irish which seem to me characteristic of her progress. It seems clear that there is a strong semantic base to her acquisition, but so far I have found no satisfactory explanation for some of the structures she uses to express her meaning. It is, however, significant that the simple meaning elements were at her disposal long before she began to analyse even simple structures. At some point she felt capable of reusing some of the elements analysed from listening and comprehending and is gradually refining what was initially unanalysed, memorized chunk-usage.

Does her progress justify the two years spent in the Nafonra? They have been happy years, in which, to my mind, she has developed in every way - socially, conceptually and linguistically. I am satisfied that her development in English has not been in any way impeded - there is plenty of scope at home in that respect. I feel, without being able to offer proof, that extending her language capabilities at an early age is an advantage in itself, if only in that she already has a less rigid concept of language than most monolinguals.

I intend to tread very warily from now on. I notice some resistance, developing out of the stress I mentioned earlier. This and her "monitor" may be personal idiosyncracies or they may be a direct result of my unskilled study-techniques. She may feel that my insistence on speaking Irish at times creates a barrier because of her less than perfect comprehension. The complex mother-child relationship is subject to strains which do not affect the Nafonra.

On the other hand, it is only fair to say that although the Nafonra has been of enormous benefit to both of us, less would have been achieved without parental support! My involvement and back-up from the rest of the family and relations (including her Granny, to whom she gives lessons!) have undoubtedly played an important role in providing confidence and opportunities for additional use of the language.

Inevitably, much has been left unexamined. In particular the verbal system she is beginning to develop shows signs of being a fascinating area of study but could not be constrained to suit the convenience of this paper. It will, however, fulfil its natural function in allowing Eithne to speak for herself some day - Go néirí leat go geal, a Eithne!

Tá mo bhfuochas ag gabháil do Máire agus Liam Mac Mathúna, Seán Devitt, Máire Ní Bhrí, Deirdre Flanagan, m'fhear chéile agus ar ndóigh, d'Eithne.

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